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THEOLOGICAL INSTRUCTION IN SWITZERLAND

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III.

BERN.

Everyone goes to Bern. No one stays in Bern. This seems to be the rule for the American public in Switzerland, and for the ordinary traveler it is easily understood. The quaint old town has too many charms to be passed by, but it lies too near the great centers of attraction in the Bernese Oberland, too near Thun and Interlaken, Grindelwald and Lauterbrunnen; and so, after a hurried glance at the clock-tower and the cathedral, the museum, and one or two modern buildings, the bears, and the wonderful view from the cathedral terrace or the Klosterhof, the tourist hastens on to see the mountains face to face or turns his steps toward Geneva.

It by no means follows that such haste is to be recommended to the student.

It is true that the theological faculty of Bern is smaller than that of Basel or Zürich, and that the lectures are given in the dreariest building I have ever known dignified by the name university,—a building whose “classic” shades make it painfully easy to sympathize with Faust when he exclaimed:

“Weh! Steck ich in dem Kerker noch?
Verfluchtes, dumpfes Mauerloch!”

especially when one remembers that the whole glory of the Bernese Oberland lies just outside those wretched class-rooms and is ever visible from the windows.

It is also true that the immediate situation of the city has no such charm as that of Zürich, though, on its sandstone peninsula high above the swift Aare, Bern is much more picturesque than

Basel. Nevertheless, the newer suburbs must afford delightful places for residence, while the wonderful Alpine views from the city itself and the neighboring hills, together with the fact that the very heart of the Oberland can be reached at any time in a few hours, may well commend Bern to one who wishes to carry on his studies for a summer semester and still be within easy reach and under the constant spell of the Bernese Alps.

At the same time there are attractions in departments closely allied to that of theology which ought not to be overlooked. Professor Ludwig Stein, for instance, who gave up the position of Jewish Rabbi in Berlin to devote himself to philosophy, presents the history and problems of his chosen department in an exceedingly vivid and attractive manner and draws about him many enthusiastic listeners. So the historian, Professor Philipp Woker, who also lectures on church history in the (old) Catholic faculty, is most admirable as a lecturer, despite some peculiar mannerisms, and is a great favorite with his students.

In the theological faculty itself we find a state of things somewhat different from that in either of the other universities.

Doubtless the best known name is that of Professor Rudolf Steck, who lectures on New Testament introduction and exegesis. He is a man fifty years of age, a native of Bern, and has been professor there for eleven years. He is delightfully informal socially, while as a lecturer his manner is very quiet, with occasional touches of humor. There is nothing about him in any way striking, and a stranger who met him or saw him in the class-room would have no idea that he was looking at the principal exponent of one of the most radical critical hypotheses about the New Testament which has ever been suggested. Professor Steck, and apart from him no one outside of Holland, regards the comparatively pacific tone of the Acts as representing the real state of things in the early church, and rejects every single Pauline epistle as a spurious work, forged in the interest of an increasingly bitter conflict between Jewish and Gentile Christians. From this standpoint he not only regards all these epistles as late forgeries, but also reverses their commonly accepted order, placing those last which, like Galatians,

show the most intensity of feeling. This is Baur's critical process stretched to such an extreme that, like an umbrella, it has suddenly turned inside out and reversed all its own previous conclusions. It is to the credit of German criticism that Professor Steck stands almost absolutely alone in this matter, and that the genuineness of at least the four greater Pauline epistles is practically unquestioned.

Next to Professor Steck, and with him representing the radical element in the Bern theological faculty, is Professor H. Lüdemann, who has the chair of dogmatics and history of theology. Whether one sympathizes with his views or not, it is refreshing to mark his outspoken frankness and earnestness of conviction and to listen to his clean-cut sentences in the classroom. In him there is no minimum, even, of the Ritschlian leaven, and he gives the impression of being much like Professor Schmidt of Basel in his aggressive advocacy of the "reform" in theology. He was born in Kiel in 1842, and was extraordinary professor there from 1878 till 1884, when he was called to Bern as full professor.

The other active professors, E. E. Müller, F. Barth and S. Oettli, are supposed to represent the center and right wing, perhaps in the order mentioned, although I imagine that the right wing at Bern does not reach very far beyond the center.

Among them Professor Oettli, with his vivid manner and decided Swiss accent, is looked upon as a very strong man in his department of Old Testament introduction and exegesis. He assisted in commenting on the Hagiographa in Strack's and Zöckler's Commentary.

Such are the leading theological instructors in the three universities of German Switzerland. Let us try briefly to sum up the results of our investigations.

First of all, there is abundant opportunity to study the methods and results of the more radical German critical and theological tendencies. No one can fail to be struck by the predominance of a decidedly liberal theology. Orthodoxy is represented, but, as a rule, not by the men who give tone to the various institutions. Only in Basel is there a thoroughly

vigorous orthodox party under the leadership of Orelli, and even there my own personal feeling is that the aggressiveness and enthusiasm are rather on the side of the liberal element. Orelli himself seems to be overmatched in influence by Duhm, while Schmidt probably produces a deeper impression upon the students than any other man in the faculty.

This fact does not exactly recommend German Switzerland for inexperienced or unstable American students who have hitherto come in contact with little but the systems and traditions of American orthodoxy. The shock would probably be too severe to be altogether wholesome.

When Professor Schmidt, in an address on the "inner unity of the protestant church" delivered at the *Reformtag* at St. Gallen last June, speaks of the doctrines of the pre-existence of Christ, the personality of God, the atonement and the life everlasting as "non-essentials," doctrines whose acceptance or rejection ought not to prevent men from working together as Christians in the same church—then the uninitiated Christian from across the ocean is inclined to catch his breath and wonder what doctrines Professor Schmidt does regard as of any special consequence: nor, *these things* being *abandoned* or *questioned*, can he find a great deal of satisfaction in the one thing which Schmidt does emphasize, faith "in a living God, the God of Jesus Christ, the Holy One, whose demand of holiness is as omnipresent as is his sin-cleansing power in all who open their hearts to the incoming of his spirit."

I do not believe that every young man, or every pastor, is ready to listen with impunity to such instruction. It may possibly be pure mountain air, but, if so, it is too rare to be breathed with impunity by one fresh from the valley. It is apt to produce hemorrhage. But for the more thoughtful, for those who already realize something of the magnitude of the questions that must be answered, it ought to be a wholesome thing, as it certainly is an intensely interesting and stimulating thing, to come face to face with the extreme results of methods of treating Scripture whose cautious application to the Old Testament is already causing so much feeling in our own country.

It is also a valuable lesson in charity, a lesson which may help us to estimate at their true worth the relatively insignificant matters over which we are exercised in our assemblies and mission boards. It *ought*, surely, to enlarge our sympathies when we become familiar with the spirit of men who have no thought of going out of the church, who glory in their protestant Christianity, and who verily believe that they are going on in the spirit of the reformation; who even address missionary gatherings, and nevertheless deny or question nearly every doctrine which we have been wont to regard as distinctive of Christianity.

Apart from their critical and dogmatic position there is no doubt that the universities of German Switzerland offer excellent facilities both for pursuing special lines of theological study and also for hearing lectures on those allied branches of philosophy, history and social science which are so closely connected with the practical work of the ministry.

If I were to rank the three universities according to their value for the theological student or pastor simply as places for study, the order would be Basel, Zürich, Bern. If, on the other hand, I were to rank the cities according to their relative attractiveness as places of residence and centers from which to make excursions in the spring and early summer, the order would be Zürich, Bern, Basel.

FRENCH SWITZERLAND.

As already indicated, the transition from German to French Switzerland is almost like passing from one country to another. Language, physiognomy, traditions, methods of thought, are all sharply contrasted; and this contrast is quite as marked in the theological schools as elsewhere, especially in the independent schools.

In the comparatively large universities of Geneva and Lausanne the external difference is less pronounced. Here there is much of the freedom of the German university life, the students being left largely to their own tastes and inclinations in the choice of lectures, etc. In the independent schools, on the con-

trary, where there is but the single faculty and a small number of students, the state of things is much more like that in our own smaller theological seminaries, and this is also the case in the academy of Neuchâtel. In these schools the relations between professors and students are far more intimate, and the courses of study pursued by the individual students are subjected to a much more rigid supervision than in the universities. The champion of the university system would probably say that the young men in the independent schools are treated as scholars rather than as students, but this method has, nevertheless, its own manifest advantages.

I shall make no attempt to describe the six theological faculties of French Switzerland with the same personal detail with which I have spoken of the three in German Switzerland, but shall content myself with general statements and calling attention to a few of the best-known instructors.

GENEVA.

The charms of Geneva for both summer and winter residence are too well known to need any description in such an article as this. Those who are at all acquainted with Switzerland know something of the beauties and wonderful location of this most attractive city. It is probable, however, that the traveling public is much more familiar with the Pont du Montblanc and the Jardin Anglais than it is even with the fine university, fronting the Promenade des Bastions, with its hundred professors and instructors and six hundred students; while comparatively few ever find their way to the unpretending Oratoire, in the obscure Rue Tabassont, where between sixty and seventy young men are receiving an evangelical theological training or the preparatory schooling.

With reference to the theological department of the *University*, with its five professors and rather more than forty students, I must repeat the statement that here a liberal spirit prevails, not so different from that of German Switzerland. It is, however, somewhat more conservative, no one holding so radical ground as do several of the professors whose names I have already men-

tioned. A most admirable and authoritative statement of the attitude of the *Église Nationale* in Geneva is given in an article entitled "Protestantism in Geneva," by Professor August Bouvier, professor of systematic theology in the university. The article was written for *The Modern Review* of January 1, 1884, but the French text is published in pamphlet form in the Librairie Fischbacher, Paris, and the Librairie Cherbuliez, Geneva. From this it will be seen that the position taken by the theologians of the university, in harmony with the party of "liberal Christianity" or "modern theology" (technical terms in French Switzerland), is a somewhat radical assertion of the rationalistic standpoint. It is evidently the position of Professor Bouvier himself and denies "inspiration, miracles, the supernatural, dogmatism and confessionalism." It retains, however, "Christian theism, the central and sovereign place which belongs to Christ in the faith and religious life of the soul, and in the history of humanity, to Christ the revealer of the divine sonship of men, the founder of the kingdom of God and of true civilization, moral and social; and finally, personal survival, which, in the opinion of almost all, will eventuate under the government of God in universal salvation." Professor Bouvier himself cannot fail to make a lasting and most delightful impression, with his tall form, silvery hair and gracious manner. He is a native of Geneva, a son-in-law of Adolf Monod, is now sixty-six years of age and has been a member of the faculty for twenty-seven years.

I notice by the catalogue that of forty-four students only fifteen are Swiss, while twenty-five are French, three are Italian and one is German.

Over against the liberalism of the university, the conservatism of the theological school established by the *Société Évangélique* is all the more marked. Founded, as already stated, as a direct reaction against German socinianism, it does not desire to draw its students exclusively from any one denomination, but "desires to be of service to all the churches which have *preserved the foundations of the faith*, and call for pastors according to the heart of God." Among the conditions of admission is one

which would cause no surprise in America, but which a person fresh from a German university feels like reading over two or three times to make sure that there is no mistake. It is that the applicant must make a written statement of the circumstances of his conversion and of the motives which have led him to choose the university.

Of the professors I can speak from personal knowledge of but a single one, Professor Baumgartner, a young man of most charming address, who has recently received his Ph.D. from Marburg, and who has the chair of Old Testament introduction and exegesis.

Such are in general the attitudes of the two theological faculties of Geneva, and one scarcely need call attention to the opportunities for study offered by two so sharply contrasted schools in a city itself so fascinating.